

PENANG MUSEUMS AND CULTURE

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Introduction

The phrase culture wars might have started in mid-19th century Germany but it came into wider usage since the 1960s in reference to the ideological polarizations among Americans into the liberal and conservative camps (Hunter, 1991; Luke, 2002). In Malaysia such wars are still non-existent but the culture competition within and among museums is as intense due to the pervasive influence of ethnicity in various facets of the national life. As a result museum foregrounding of culture (and history) have become contested (Matheson-Hooker, 2003: 1-11; Teo, 2010: 73-113; Abu Talib, 2008: 45-70; Abu Talib, 2011: 207-224). This essay looks at culture display in Penang museums notably the Penang State Museum and culture competition within and among these museums which are under the control of myriad bodies including the state Department of Museum, other government departments, a university, private organizations and individuals. The discussion is based on the scrutiny of museum exhibits, museum annual reports, writings on museums in Malaysia and interviews with members of museum board.

Museums in Penang

Penang started with a single museum in 1965. By 2013 the state has more than 15 museums, mini museums (one is located within the main building of the Penang General Hospital) and galleries that cover ethnography, history, the second world war, the arts, owl, cats, Islam, toys, flora and fauna, Sun Yat Sen and a consummate entertainer from the state. The latest is the Made in Penang Interactive Museum located in Weld Quay facing the Penang harbour that offers 30 giant 3D art pieces that tell stories about Penang's lifestyle. Most of these museums and galleries are located within the city of George Town. A number of private museums are located within the city's heritage enclave, straddling the heritage trail which is popular with local and foreign tourists. Table 1 highlights 10 of these museums, their locations and the main features of their permanent exhibits.

Table 1: Selected Penang museums

Name of Museum	Location	Main features of permanent exhibits
Penang State Museum and Art Gallery (1965) (state)	Farquhar Street, George Town	Social history and culture of the various races including the Chinese Peranakan, the transformation of Penang into an international port with a cosmopolitan population. Portraits of early 19 th century Penang

		and the Japanese Occupation.
Museum & Gallery Tuanku Fauziah (1982) (university)	Minden Campus, Universiti Sains Malaysia	Ethnography, science and technology, astronomy and archaeology notably the Perak Man unearthed in the Lenggong valley in the 1990s.
Penang Forestry Museum (1983) (Forestry Department)	Telok Bahang	Flora and fauna of Penang, information on jungles and the types of wood found in mangrove swamp forest, mangrove forest, coastal hills and highland forest besides the wood industry and uses of wood in the everyday life of Malaysians.
P Ramlee Gallery (2002) (National Archives)	Perak Road, George Town	The life of P Ramlee with his mates in Penang; his musical and film career, his movies' leading ladies and cartoons on Ramlee that had appeared in local magazines.
Penang Islamic Museum (1995) (private organisation)	Acheen Street, George Town	Islam, Islamic culture, Islamic leaders in Penang, Islamic architecture and the <i>pondok</i> education in Seberang Perai. Islam in Penang and the Malay Peninsula; its spread through trade.
Penang War Museum (2002) (private ownership)	Batu Maung	Outdoor museum sited on a former British military base constructed in the 1930s. Complete with gun emplacements, spent cartridges, military motorcycle, military intelligence room, Japanese torture room torture weapons, pictures of Japanese torture victims, war memorial, the trial of Japanese war criminals and punishment meted to them, replica of a hanging gallows and British re-entry into Penang in September 1945.
Penang Peranakan Museum (2010) (private ownership)	Church Street, George Town	Antiques, kitchen utensils, colorful ceramics, Peranakan dress (kebaya and sarong), bridal costumes and porcelain wares used by the Penang Peranakan. Family ancestral temple and prayer altar.
One East Museum (2011) (private ownership)	Dunlop Road, George Town	Culture of the Chinese and Peranakan Chinese, art pieces from well known artists in Southeast Asia, famille rose figurines, ceramic, antique furniture

		used by Peranakan Chinese in late 19 th century until 1911.
Malay Museum (2010) (federal department)	Hutton Lane, George Town	Way and life of the Malay-Muslims notably the Jawi-Peranakan including household utensils, cultural life and musical instruments.
Ben's Vintage Toy Museum (2011) (private ownership)	Acheen Street, George Town	10,000 toys including wind up toys, battery powered and celluloid which include toys of the pre-war die-cast era, dinky toys, German doll of 1920 and Victorian toys of 1860

Penang State Museum

The 2004 official report on museums in Malaysia describes the Penang State Museum as follows: “the ground floor showcases the social cultural history of the major ethnic races in Penang while the upper floor informs visitors of the influence of each race on the other’s culture. The upper floor also displays 19th century paintings of Old Penang notably the Captain Robert Smith Collection of 1819 [sic]” (Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism, 2004: 40).

The state museum started with ethnography, archaeology and natural history. Its annual reports, which did not always appear on time, provide fascinating details on its expansion. For the more recent ones, there is much less details on museum collections, the problems it faced or visitor feedbacks. Before 2006 these appeared in Malay and English under various titles (initially as *Penyata Tahunan* but after 1973, *Lapuran/Laporan Tahunan* but both means annual report). For unknown reasons only a few issues came complete with page numbers. Efforts to start a museum began in 1941 through private initiatives (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1965a: 12) but these ended with the Japanese Occupation. Another attempt was made in 1956 through the British Resident Councilor R. P. Bingham but it ended when the building that housed the exhibits was demolished. In the early 1960s the museum project was revived through the Penang Historical Society and Penang Art Society. The museum was closely associated with Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman who had selected a two-storey building which was part of the Penang Free School (1907-1927) and Hutchings School (1928-60) which the state government duly acquired in 1962. Tunku had studied here when he was a student of the Penang Free School (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1965a: 9). In July 1964 a visitors’ day for “Friends of the Museum” was held and during the occasion promises of donations of exhibits and expert assistance were made. Chan Kit Ying, a former inspector of Chinese schools, offered his service and advice on exhibits of Chinese culture. Haji Fathil Basheer, a highly respected member of the Malay community (his great grandfather Sheikh Omar Basheer was a well known leader of the Malay community and religious teacher in the 19th century), donated 60 objects including a hand written Quran that was more than 100 years old. The museum designed a special case for this collection which was placed in the History of Penang room.

With initial exhibits of less than 300 the Penang Museum and Art Gallery was officially opened by the state governor on 14 April 1965. It aimed “to preserve and attractively display, the past and present life of its inhabitants, to interest residents and visitors and to encourage our children to acquire, and value, knowledge of their environment” (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1965a: 11). A.

Nichol-Smith was appointed honorary curator until her demise in February 1967. At the time this former curator of the Zanzibar Museum in East Africa was teaching English at the Malayan Teachers College in Gelugor. The museum was located on the ground floor of the building occupying space measuring 132 feet by 52 feet while the smaller first floor - 96 feet by 28 feet - was taken up by the Art Gallery. In 1994 the entire building was occupied by the museum after the Art Gallery moved to the nearby Dewan Sri Pinang. The museum was divided into 7 rooms namely History of Penang in Room 1, Development of Education and Commerce in Room 2, Arts and Customs in Room 3, Ethnographical Exhibits in Room 4, Temporary Exhibits on loan from the National Museum in Room 5, Natural History in Room 6 and the Curator's Office and Workshop in Room 7 (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1965b: np) The arrangement was not much different from the original plan that focused on history, Chinese culture and customs, the island room, natural history and embroideries and costumes (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1965a: 18-21). The front gallery provides general information on Penang and relief map of the island showing places of historical interest while the rear gallery was reserved for further display. The major attractions during the opening were the Haji Fathil collection and Merdeka Bay, East India Company and Francis Light, the (Peranakan) Bridal Chamber, the Lion Dance diorama, Paddy Cultivation, Malay fishing village, kingfishers from Penang and Marine Life.

Despite initial hiccup officials were optimistic of the museum's future. According to the first annual report "there is still plenty to be done in research and authentication of specimens and documents. There is need for more funds so that glass cases can be made to house delicate and irreplaceable costumes, more material may be included in the museum, and education and cultural projects of a visual nature be carried out, as is proper to an active modern museum. Displays can be considered if more space become available" (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1965b: np). These had to be done within an annual budget of \$30,000.¹ By 1970 the management committee expressed concern that this allocation was insufficient to maintain existing services and to embark on future improvements. In 1971 the state government increased the allocation to \$40,000 and by the end of 1980 to \$110,000, \$250,00 in 1989 and to \$350,000 in 1990 although the bulk of the allocations were used for salary and utility expenses (Penang State Museum Board, 1991: 9). By the 1990s part of the allocation was also used for sending museum staff to various courses and seminars so as to equip them with better knowledge that would enabled them to provide better services to the public. These courses include the workshop on the "Care Conservation of Museum Objects" which was held in Mysore, India, the "Identification and Preservation of Photographs Workshop" which was organized by the National Museum in Kuala Lumpur, the "Conservation Workshop" in Sabah and the "Workshop on Malay Costumes and Textiles" in Terengganu (Penang State Museum Board, 1993: np).

In 1966 many more exhibits had made their way into the museum (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1966: np). These include Malay, Chinese and Indian musical instruments, Indian *kavadis* and Malay jewelry which were donated by Tunku Ahmad Tajuddin Tunku Ibrahim. The last items were displayed in new showcases located in the north corridor. The History Room received Neolithic stone artifacts known as the Gelugor Hoard² from Penang tycoon Loh Boon Siew, a copy of the Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Penang Riots of 1867 and photograph of volunteers to quell the riot which were donated by the Penang Historical Society. A python presented by Tunku Abdul Rahman was added to the display in one of the temporary dioramas in the Natural History Room. The construction of

¹ Prior to 1992 when the RM (Ringgit Malaysia) was used the Malaysian currency was known as dollar (*ringgit*) denoted by the symbol \$.

² These were flanged axes, beaked adzes, amulet or pendant and damaged perforated stone disc which were unearthed during house construction in Bukit Gambir in December 1965.

two dioramas which show night and day mammals at a cost of \$4,830.41 was started in 1968; it was completed in early 1969 (Penang State Museum Board, 1975: 15). With such varied exhibits the Natural History Room proved to be one of the museum's draw cards until the early 1990s.

In 1967 a Transport Section was added which was subsequently filled by a pony cart that was in use in the 1920s, sedan chair, photographs and a comprehensive report on the history of transport in Penang (Penang State Museum Board and Art Gallery, 1967: np). In 1972 a room on the first floor was renovated into the Tunku Room. It was fitted with seven showcases to display 145 pieces of rare kris, miscellaneous weapons, a 141 year old handmade silver teapot and 35 personal awards that were on loan from the Tunku. Following his demise in December 1990, the Tunku's personal awards were taken out for use in the state funeral that was held in Alor Setar. By October 1993 all remaining items were transferred to the National Archives (Penang State Museum Board, 1993: np) and subsequently to the Tunku Abdul Rahman Memorial which was opened in 1994. At the moment the room is occupied by exhibits of Old Penang.

The Chinese Culture Room was created in 1967 to accommodate the Chinese Opera costumes and Lion Dance costumes. Two large showcases were constructed to house these and to protect them against deterioration while the lighting system was re-arranged to provide better lighting. A model of the Air Itam Dam which was donated by the George Town City Council and a musical cabinet donated by Cheah Eow Hooi were put on display in the front corridor. In 1975 Light's statue was moved from the back of the museum and placed in the front lawn on top a special concrete pedestal (Penang State Museum Board, 1975: 44). An old garden lamp was installed to brighten the statue and its surrounding areas at night besides keeping away undesirable elements. It was presented by the Executors and Trustees of the late Khoo Sian Ee.

Since its opening various improvements were made to the museum. In 1966 the Costume and Embroidery Room was fitted with air-conditioning while the bridal chamber was enclosed within a large showcase. In the northern corridor the showcases were recessed within the walls adjoining the main rooms to allow for more space (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1966: np). In 1969 a museum garden was created to house large historical objects like canons, Japanese bombs and mines and the anchor of a French warship the *Les Mousquet* which was sunk by the German light cruiser *Emden* on 29 October 1914 approximately 11 nautical miles off the Muka Head coast in the north west of the island. The *Emden* had terrorized British merchantmen in the Bay of Bengal and the Straits of Melaka in 1914 after the outbreak of the First World War. Earlier in the day it had brazenly shelled Penang harbor inflicting considerable damage including the sinking of the Russian cruiser *Zhemshug* off the E & O Hotel with the loss of 89 lives including scores of Japanese prostitutes who were on board at the time (Shennan, 2000: 82-87). Besides serving as car park, the garden also housed a Hill Railway coach and a Rolls Royce that was previously used by the first Penang governor and before that Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner who was assassinated in October 1951 by armed communists while on his way to Frazer's Hill. In 1971-72 the existing displays were re-sited to make room for new acquisitions (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1972: np). The History Room was re-arranged to accommodate more photographs of Penang. The Embroidery Room had more Chinese embroidered costumes added besides two new showcases to display Malay costumes. The Natural History section had two new showcases to display Malaysian birds which were donated by the National Museum. Twenty seven pieces of old Kelantan silverware were put on display in a wall showcase along the front corridor. These were presented by Mrs. K. G. Exham of England whose father was the first chief of the Penang Fire Brigade.

In 1977 the museum again carried out minor improvements to the existing showcases and electrical fittings to ensure irreplaceable embroideries and costumes were kept within minimum conservational standard. The museum's fluorescent tubes were replaced with tungsten lamp and aluminum eye-ball fittings as the former were not conducive to the conservation of exhibits especially embroideries. These affected the Chinese Hall, Bridal Chamber, Lion Dance, Embroidery and the Tunku Room. The showcases in these rooms were modified with a false ceiling of opaque plexiglass to conceal the tungsten lamps (Penang State Museum Board, 1977: 14). Three dozens 'Morden' ultra violet absorbing tube-jackets were placed in the museum to filter the remaining fluorescent tubes that emit high proportion of ultra violet radiation. In 1992 the Museum and the Art Gallery was given a new coat of paint while the roof of the Hill Railway coach was replaced with aluminum. These were undertaken to coincide with the Conference of Rulers which was held in Penang that year. Rewiring was extended to the Art Gallery in preparation for the air-conditioning of the entire building which was completed in 1991. To control humidity two units of dehumidifiers were installed in the History and Embroidery Rooms.

The museum continued to expand its collections through public donations or purchases that were funded either by the museum, the state or individuals/institution quite often with inflated prices (Tan Kim Hong, 2014). In the early years regular appeals were made to the Penang public who generously contributed a diversity of exhibits which quickly filled up museum space. In the 1965 commemorative booklet a list of 25 donors were highlighted which include individuals and institutions. The notable ones were Haji Fathil Basheer, Captain Mohd Noor Mohamed, the Penang Historical Society, J. S. H. Cunynham-Brown, Loo Kam Fat and Ong Eng Khuan. Other donors in that year were the trustees of the estate of Kapitan Chung Keng Kwee, Low Hooi Seah and Soon Tuck Wooi (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1965b: np). In 1975 the Fong Seong Cup was presented by the Penang Badminton Association (Penang State Museum Board, 1975: 50). The silver cup was manufactured in London in 1936 and meant for the inter-state Men Badminton Championship which Penang won 21 times out of the 29 it was contested. In 1992 some of the documents in the Haji Fathil collection and Francis Light's will were subjected to conservation measures undertaken by the National Archives (Penang State Museum Board, 1992: 13). The Haji Fathil collection formed part of the fascinating history of the Penang Malays in the second half of the 19th century. One student was able to make use of them in her study of Malay involvement in secret societies (Mahani, 2003).

Museum collections continued to increase until the early 1990s. In 1982 the museum purchased the collection of nyonya and Kwantung porcelain wares through a special loan from the state government and donors like the Penang Turf Club, the Lee Foundation and the Datuk Keramat Tin Smelting Company. In 1986 the museum received two Siamese swords belonging to the late Khaw Sim Kong, former "rajah" or governor of Ranong (Cushman, 1986: 64), Thailand which were presented by his grandson, Khaw Bian Huat (Penang State Museum Board, 1986: 27-28). In November the same year a dragon boat head and tail was presented by Tommy Khoo Sian Kheng, chairman of the Penang Boat Festival while Mrs Tang Yoke Lin presented a piano which was used by Jimmy Boyle, the well known music composer from Penang, when he was a boy. In June 1988 a set of ninety-three pieces of *wayang kulit* puppets and thirty *gamelan* brass gongs were donated by Haji Razkin Omar from Bukit Mertajam. These belonged to his late grandfather who was a *wayang Tok Dalang* (puppeteer) (Penang State Museum Board, 1988: 25). Other items secured were Malay traditional kitchen utensils from Seberang Perai which include a set of tools for making the traditional utensils as well as *buyong kecil* (small pot) for storing water, *belanga* (earthen pot) for cooking curry, *periok kukusan* (double boiler) and *perasapan* (incense boiler). These items were bought from the family of the late Zainab Mat Saman. In 1989 a set of

33 old coins of Penang (1786-1828) was purchased from the 75 year old Phoon Kee Khuan (Penang State Museum Board, 1989: np). These coins were the first coins issued for use in Penang and were an important part of the early numismatic heritage of Penang. The cost of \$9,650 for the purchase was defrayed from public donations and the state government. In 1991 the museum acquired the collection of silver antiques belonging to the late Robert Corbertt, founder member and first president of the Perak Orchid Society. The collection of 82 items consisted of fine Malay and Peranakan silver jewelry like brooches, bracelet, modesty disc, pillow and bolster ends, belt buckles and other decorations of antique silver (Penang State Museum Board, 1991: 13). In 1992 a porcelain *nyonya* ladle was received from antique dealer Saw Joo Ann.

Space was a major problem. The 1967 annual report had remarked “as there is no more space for the museum’s expansion, it is hoped that the state government will find ways and means to implement their decision to rebuild the bombed half of the original building.” The need for space was pressing as “there is a great deal more material of educational and cultural interest that should be added to the museum” necessitating the museum to use the corridor and stairways. More than a decade later another report had voiced similar concern. “The most pressing problem facing the museum at this moment is the shortage of space. The museum’s present collection has grown in such an enormous size that it is not exaggerating that visitors to the museum today had hardly left with any space to walk. New materials and information are encountered every now and then, but there is no more available space to display them” (Penang State Museum Board, 1979: 11). By the end of the 1980s when I first set foot in the museum the exhibits were scattered all over the entire floor. It was mildly chaotic. In the early 1990s visitors have voiced out the sorry state of the museum and display congestion besides the need to bring the museum more up to date (Penang State Museum Board, 1991: 9) while other items that were given to the museum – like the Cadillac which served as state official car and an old fire engine – were either stored at the state garage or in the case of the fire engine, returned to the Perak Road Fire Department for safekeeping (Penang State Museum Board, 1993: np).

In the early 1970s there was much discussion, planning and even public drive to collect funds to rebuild the bombed half of the original building but the entire project was abandoned due to safety reasons. In 1990 a panel of architects under Lawrence Loh, a member of the museum board, was entrusted to redesign the museum interior so that all the exhibits can be displayed properly while preserving the building’s architecture (Penang State Museum Board, 1990: np). Subsequently the museum was closed for 6 months to enable renovation works to be undertaken. However it was only in 1994 after the Art Gallery had shifted to Dewan Sri Pinang, following the move of the George Town city administration to the new office complex at Komtar, that the museum have more space. Currently it has additional space at No. 57 Macalister Road in the form of a renovated former maternity hospital. However the museum’s base remains at Farquhar Street.

As with the National Museum, a few individuals could be regarded as icons in the museum’s development. The Tunku’s interest in the museum was well known. The museum reciprocated with the Tunku Room. The other was Captain Mohd Noor Mohamed who was chairman of the State Museum Board from 1973 until his demise in June 1990. From 1964 to 1972 he was a member of the Museum Management Committee and headed the museum sub-committee (Penang State Museum Board, 1990: np). As head of the Penang Historical Society he had played an instrumental role in getting the museum project alive “through research, lectures and exhibitions held when and where they could and to which the museum is deeply indebted.” His untiring energy enabled the museum to enjoy continued public support. He was especially successful in persuading elderly Malays to sell or donate invaluable cultural items to the museum. The other was Khoo Boo Chia who was curator from 1976 until his retirement in

the early 2000s. He joined the museum in 1971 and as curator had chartered the museum's remarkable growth and presided over its transformation that focused on culture and history popularly labelled the Penang Story. The museum had also benefitted from the technical and professional support provided by the National Museum on layout and scientific display techniques through taxidermist A. S. Dryberg and Wee Ho Cheng, display officer Lim Tong Juan, artist Rahmat Ahmad, museum assistants Abdullah Hassan, Halim Nasir and Khoo Swee Hoe and marine curators A. T. Johnson and J. Fisher (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1965a: 12, 26). In the mid-1970s the National Museum provided training on conservation and display techniques for two of its staff (Penang State Museum Board, 1977: 15). Such crucial support continued for many years which the museum acknowledged in its annual reports. However the museum's emphasis on natural history which was modelled on the National Museum was discarded in the mid-1990s in favour of the Penang Story whereas the latter followed similar path in 2007 when the National Museum was changed into a national history museum as directed by the Minister of Culture.

The Penang Story and state museums

The Penang Story, as described by the 2004 National Museum publication, came out much later in the mid 1990s following a major reorganization based on Yvonne Teh Shuang Lyn who recommended the museum focused on "culture as the thread which links together the past and the present. Penang's cultural pluralism provides a cosmopolitanism somewhat unusual in so small an area ... and yet amidst this diversity, unity exists through their common Penangite identity" (Penang State Museum Board, 1991: 10). Yvonne Teh was then a doctoral candidate in anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania specialising on material culture, identity and museum studies. She had worked at the Logan Museum of Anthropology in Wisconsin which was a college museum besides internship at a museum in London. Following her recommendation the museum was divided into themes based on the culture of the various ethnic groups, their living craft and history. The circulation of the entire building was re-organised to enable visitors to have a better understanding of the museum as a cultural history centre. Each room was given a theme to reflect a particular culture history focus while the exhibits, materials and lighting for each room were selected to fit the chosen theme. The up-grading which include the landscaping of the car park and lawn and the addition of storage space was made possible by a RM500,000 grant from the Ministry of Arts and Tourism (Penang State Museum Board, 1992: 9). Following this reorganization both ethnography and history became intrinsic part of the Penang Story – the story of cultural mingling as George Town evolved into an international port with its multi-cultural society while natural history had disappeared completely.

The official museum booklet neatly summarized the Penang Story as follows. Originally a part of the Kedah sultanate, the island received people from Kedah long before an English outpost was established in 1786. Booming trade within the region and Penang had attracted all kinds of other people to the island among them the first Chinese settlers who were merchants and traders mainly from south China. Many had adapted to the local Malay culture and became known as baba nyonya (Peranakan Chinese). The early Indians, coming from different parts of the sub-continent were dominated by the Tamils of south India. They too were mostly merchants and traders and money lenders while others were plantation labourers or civil clerks. The early labourers were mainly convicts from India; many settled on the island after completing their sentences. Penang's colorful multi-ethnic society today is dominated by the three communities of Malay, Chinese and Indian which have co-existed in harmony for generations.

Historically Penang is noted for its ethnic diversities which include Arabs, Achehnese, Armenian, Burmese, Japanese, Javanese, Minangkabaus, Siamese, Sinhalese and Eurasians (offsprings of mixed marriages between Europeans and Asians) – all contributing to the island's cultural potpourri. Unique mix-marriages between locals or others and the early foreign settlers from other parts of Asia had also gave rise to mix-groups like the Chinese Peranakans, Jawi Peranakan (Jawi Pekan) and the Arab Peranakan. They have their own unique culture and language. These diverse cultural activities, cuisines, dances, music, daily pursuits and pastimes of the people are put on display notably the *boria* and the *nasi kandar* which are closely associated with the Jawi Peranakan and Indian-Muslims.

In line with the Penang Story, the ground floor of the state museum focuses on the peoples of Penang with each of the major races accorded a room - the Malay Room, the Chinese Room, the Indian Room besides the Wedding Chamber and the Nyonya Costumes. The first floor covers Francis Light and the colonial period including the Japanese Occupation and the post-1945 period. The Captain Robert Smith paintings are kept in a room located on this floor: eight of the ten paintings shown here were completed before Smith, a military engineer, left Penang in 1818. The other important exhibit is the jinrikisha which was an important mode of transportation in George Town especially during the interwar years. Visitors are informed that in 1927 there were 3,441 of them but by 1941 their number had dwindled to 2,121. By 1961 there were only 12 left as trishaws were more practical. Other exhibits located here are spices – star anise, black pepper, sliced areca nut, dried turmeric, nutmeg seeds, cloves, dried chilly and cinnamon sticks – highlighting Penang as an important hub of the spice trade during British colonial rule – besides the *kopitiam* or Chinese coffee shop which were intrinsic part of the urban landscape in Penang and elsewhere.

To reinforce the Penang Story adequate information and exhibits are placed in the various rooms. The island was already inhabited prior to Light's arrival in 1786 and this is corroborated by archaeological evidence. Penang then was known among the Malays as Pulau Ka Satu and Tanjung Penaga. Connected to the various races that had come to the island since the mid-18th century are the many cultural exhibits like betel leaf, *tepak sireh* including those in the shape of lacquer boxes for the Peranakan Chinese.

There are plenty of exhibits related to the Malays such as *kitab kuning*, printing of religious treatises, *ulamas* and *pondoks* in Seberang Perai, Malay traditional dresses, Islamic calligraphy, daily utensils used by the Malays, well known Penang mosques (Batu Uban mosque, Acheen Street mosques, the Benggali mosque and the Kapitan Keling mosque), traditional Malay carpentry tools, the front of a traditional Penang Malay house, silver and brass wares used in Malay weddings, Malay marriage, traditional Malay jewelry, the *songket* and male and female headgear, bridal bed, the *boria* and Malay weaponry.

In the Chinese room are shown crafted traditional chairs, opium bed, opium pipe (opium smoking was publicly allowed before 1940), information on the Straits Chinese, Chinese wedding and Chinese Peranakan wedding with wedding bed, cupboard, dowry chest, wash basin and marriage costumes. A more elaborate Peranakan corner displays various exhibits including black morning dress, nyonya embroidery, nyonya long dress, pekalong sarong from Java in muted tones and distinct prints, beaded slippers, batek and sarong from India.

A much smaller section on the ground floor is reserved for the Indians (the Indian Room) by giving attention to the diverse Indian groups through the showcasing of religious festivals, house of worships, marriage and household utensils found in Indian homes. Also thrown in are Indian musical

instruments like the flute and *tabla* while visitors are greeted with soothing Indian music when they proceed to this section. However it is evident that within this little space the Tamils predominate over the Sikhs, Sinhalese and Malayalees.

Historical sketches, drawings and photographs of Old Penang form an important part of the museum collection and the Penang Story. These paintings were executed by English artists including military officers like Captain Robert Smith, Marthelemy Lauvergne, William Daniell, Catherine Trevor, Thomas Prinsep, Admiral Theodore Auguste Fisquet. Lt. Walford Thomas Bellairs and Anna Swabe Nee Piper. The collection started in 1965 when the Penang Historical Society contributed paintings of Old Penang. Three years later the museum received 7 reproduction of lithographs of Old Penang from the Singapore Museum. In 1969 the Robert Smith collection was donated by the estate of the late Heah Joo Seang (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1970: np). The collection was a set of paintings including the "View of the Cascades", "View of the Great Tree", "Ship Lord Lowther", "Panoramic Sketch of the Prince of Wales Island", "View from Halliburton's Hill", "View of Suffolk House" (2 copies), "View of Suffolk House" (black and white), "View of North Beach from the Council House" (without colour), "View of Mt Erskine and Puloo Tikus Bay", "View of Gelugor House and Spice Plantations", "View of Chinese Mills", "View of Strawberry Hill" and "View of North Beach from Council House" (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1970: np). In 1975 three more Robert Smith originals were presented by J. C. Henderson of the Penang Chartered Bank. A few of them were sent to London for restoration works at the Parker Gallery (Penang State Museum Board, 1976: 18). On their return these were mounted in teak-wood frames with non-reflective glass and displayed in the History Room.

In 1978 the unique and rare photographs of Old Penang from the Donald Davies collection that were kept at the National Museum were reproduced for the Penang Museum. These covered local celebrations, historical buildings, prominent figures and old transportation of Penang (Penang State Museum Board, 1979: 12). In 1979 an original oil painting by William Havel (1817) was purchased. In the same year photographs of Old Penang were put on display which showcased Penang way back to 1883. These were highly appreciated by the Penang folks. In the same year the museum printed 10 coloured greetings cards from the Robert Smith collection. Costing 80 cents per card these were popular among the public. Through these cards the museum hoped "keener interest in the history of early Penang and the cultural heritage of the state would be further stimulated" (Penang State Museum Board, 1979: 13). By the end of the 1970s the museum could boast as the repository of much that is symbolic of Penang through old documents, artefacts, pictorial representations and models. In 1986 the Art Gallery section held an exhibition titled "Early Views of Penang" with 165 paintings of Penang which was a collection of originals and reproductions acquired from various museums throughout the world (Penang State Museum Board, 1986: 30). Displayed for the first time these paintings provided invaluable information on the history of Penang from 1770-1860 before the age of photography. The exhibition was opened by Captain Haji Mohd Noor, chairman of the State Museum Board while another board member, Lim Chong Keat gave a talk on "Early views of Penang" which touched on the topography, heritage and historical perspectives of Penang that were depicted in the paintings.

What happened to the many exhibits that were collected since 1965 is an interesting question. Reference had already been made of the natural history exhibits which were returned to the National Museum while the Gelugor Hoard were consigned to the store room. As for the Haji Fathil Basheer collection, the Quran is still on display in the Malay room located on the ground floor while documents relating to the 1867 secret society riots are kept elsewhere. So are the Report of the Commission of Enquiry on the Penang Riots of 1867, picture of volunteers to quell the riots, model of the Air Itam dam, the pony cart, musical cabinet, the Jimmy Boyle piano, *wayang kulit* puppets, gamelan brass gongs and

the Siamese swords. The Japanese ceremonial sword which was donated by Captain Mohd Noor in 1965 is still on display on the second floor. It served as grim reminder of the turbulent Japanese Occupation of the island although the museum's description of the period is very much toned down compared to the Penang War Museum. The few bulky displays outside the museum are still there notably Light's imposing statue, the Rolls Royce, anchor of the *Les Mousquet* and the Hill Railway coach.

This brings us to the inadequacy of the Penang Story as represented by the Penang State Museum. One ethnic group that had made considerable presence in Penang from the late 19th century to the mid-1930s were the Japanese. It was estimated they were about 3,500 Japanese in Penang during the Meiji period (1868-1912). They were a diversified group ranging from entrepreneurs in various industries notably rubber and the fishing industry to commercial agents, spies and prostitutes. The Penang State Museum never highlight the underside of the Japanese presence so as not to offend the sensitivities of the Japanese who made up the biggest number of foreign tourists to the island for much of the second half of the 20th century and Japanese contributions to the state's economy during the same period notably investment. Similarly glossed over is the island's previous connection with the Kedah sultanate and how it came into the hands of the East India Company in 1786 through devious means that involved Francis Light. The EIC's unwillingness to provide any form of military assistance as requested by Kedah against imagined or real enemies was a bitter disappointment to the Kedah ruler. This led to the failed attempts to retake the island in the 1790s and the cession of further Kedah territory which came to be known as Province Wellesley (Seberang Perai) (Bonney, 1974).

Visitors and the Penang State Museum

From 1965 to 1976 the museum annual reports had routinely included 5-7 comments from visitors notably foreign tourists. One such comment came from the British High Commissioner Sir Michael Walker who had visited the museum soon after its opening in 1965: "The museum gives a fascinating history of Penang. I am very glad to see these chapters of history being depicted so vividly and I give all my good wishes to the future of the museum" (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1965b: np). Undoubtedly the British diplomat was referring to the museum's coverage of British rule after Francis Light had landed on the island. In 1966 the samples of visitor comments include: "A most interesting collection and very well presented" (New York), "An infant museum, very healthy and promising under intelligent and loving care" (Sri Lanka), "A really splendid show. Bravo, and what excellent and good mannered Guides – truly" (Butterworth, Penang), "It is very interesting to see it" (Germany), and "A remarkable feat of organization" (Virginia, USA) (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1966: np). Similar comments appear again in the 1967 annual report: "Very interesting beginning. Hope the Museum will prosper" (England), "Nothing like this in Laos" (Laos), "Lends a third dimension to the sights of Penang" (Japan) and "One of the finest small Museums" (USA) (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1967: np). In 1972 the museum continued to receive favourable comments from foreign visitors which are printed in the annual reports: "For a small museum so interesting and wide range of exhibits. Well displayed" (Auckland, New Zealand), "Sheer delight for those not well acquainted with the arts and history of Penang" (Hong Kong), "Very instructive, inspiring and educational. Enjoyed every exhibits" (Philippines) and "Excellent museum and well maintained" (USA) (Penang State Museum and Art Gallery, 1972: np). In 1974, favourable visitor comments in the annual report include: "The contents of the Museum are most impressive" (England), "Good reminder of past history" (Australia), "Delighted to see old history of Penang so well preserved" (India), "Most enlightening visit" (Australia) and "An interesting Museum with well presented objects" (Germany) (Penang State Museum Board, 1975: 43). Similar comments appeared in the 1976 annual report: "A unique exhibition, breathtaking" (New York), "Too much richness, from such a little place" (France), "A fine review of Penang's history" (England), "A living

picture of Penang” (Melbourne) and “A really worthwhile institution for Penang” (Bangkok) (Penang State Museum Board, 1976: 12). After 1976 the annual reports no longer printed these comments although these could be gleaned from the visitors’ book. These tourists were probably attracted to the History of Penang, Chinese culture and customs, embroidery and costumes, natural history and social, education and economic exhibits, the Tunku Room (Penang State Museum Board, 1975: 45) besides the Art Gallery on the first floor.

Museum visitors were a varied group. The museum was popular among the locals “since a good number of the exhibits come from them” (Penang State Museum Board, 1978: 13). By the early 1990s the Museum and Art Gallery was included by local tourist agencies as one of their city tour itineraries (Penang State Museum Board, 1991: 11). Other visitors include school students, trainees of teacher training colleges, university students and those from outside the state and foreign tourists. The Museum and Art Gallery had also become the focus of enquiries on local history by secondary school students who were required to complete a short essay based on archival research or research at museums (Penang State Museum Board, 1991: 11-13). Among the more common topics were the history of Francis Light, Fort Cornwallis, Suffolk House, Hill Railway and old transportation of George Town. In the 1990s the museum provided practical training for final year Art and Design students from the MARA Institute of Technology. In 1992 four of them had benefitted from the program.

Interestingly visitor data does not appear in all the annual reports while the available ones do not indicate the number of foreign visitors except for 1991 and 1993. The 1991 and 1993 figures revealed between 30-35% of visitors were foreigners. In 1991 foreigners made up the majority of visitors for March, April, May and July while November, December and January were popular with domestic visitors (Penang State Museum Board, 1991: 11; Penang State Museum Board, 1993: np). However table 2 indicates a marked decrease of visitors for the first decade of the 21st century; even with the addition of the corresponding figures for the Art Gallery the totals were never anywhere near those of the first 25 years.³ A number of reasons could explain for this decrease including unexciting exhibits compared to the earlier years when the Natural History section was a major attraction while the RM1.00 entry could be a mild deterrence to locals. The separation of the museum and the art gallery had also affected visitor number. A vibrant Art Gallery could pulled the crowd to both the museum and gallery as in 1978 when museum visitors reached 106,693 compared to 77,866 in the previous year (Penang State Museum Board, 1978: 13).

Table 2: Visitors to Penang State Museum, 1965-2010⁴

Year	Total Visitors	Foreigners
1965 (Apr-Dec)	70,294	
1967	80,727	
1969	113,451	
1971	121,871	

³ These figures are 4,059 for 2006; 4,395 for 2007; 5,709 for 2008; 6,691 for 2009 and 11,428 for 2010 (Laporan Tahunan 2010: 45)

⁴ The figures are taken from Penyata Tahunan Bagi Muzium dan Balai Seni Lukis Pulau Pinang 1971/72; Laporan Tahunan 1973-75; Laporan Tahunan, 1978; Laporan Tahunan 1980; Laporan Tahunan 1991; Laporan Tahunan 1993; and Laporan Tahunan 2010: 44-45.

1973	95,085	
1975	105,371	
1977	77,866	
1980	96,958	
1991	125,290	68,659
1993	81,707	52,810
2006	31,141	
2008	48,521	
2010	56,799	

Culture competition within and among museums

The essay begins with comments on the culture wars in the United States although in Malaysia such wars are still non-existent but the cultural competition within and among museums is as intense notably in Penang as witnessed by the proliferations of private museums (see Table 1). Since the mid-19th century the Chinese had numerically dominated the Penang population and this had not changed for the entire 20th century. In 1970 the Chinese accounted for 56.1% of the state population while Malays made up 30.9%, Indians 11.5% and other racial groups at 1% but the percentage of the Chinese population was steadily declining while the Malays had increased. Thus by 2005 out of the 1.39 million of the state's population 45.53% were Chinese, 43.38% Malays, 11% Indians at 11% while the others including Eurasians and Siamese were less than 1% (Statistics Department Malaysia, 2005: 105). In 2011 the ethnic composition experienced a very small shift with Malays/*bumiputeras* outnumbering the Chinese which alarmed the Chinese community. At the Penang State Museum and other museums in the state the culture competition could be seen among the three major ethnic groups – Malays, Chinese and Indians – and within each groups.

Penang's cosmopolitan society provides an interesting case of culture competition within and among museums. This competition is closely related to the kind of plural society that had evolved after 1786 and the emergence of hybrid societies known as Chinese Peranakan, the Jawi Peranakan and Arab Peranakan. However by the first quarter of the 20th century they had reverted to either Chinese or Malays. In terms of spatial distribution the Chinese are found in all areas although their concentrations are the urban and semi-urban areas of Butterworth, Bukit Mertajam, George Town, Air Itam, Batu Feringhi-Tanjung Bunga, Bayan Baru, Relau and Sungai Ara while the majority of the Malays are found in Seberang Perai, Tanjung Tokong, Kampong Melayu Air Itam, Bayan Lepas, Balik Pulau and Perak Road. The Indians are found in Gelugor, Bayan Baru and Tanjung Bunga. The smaller Sikh community are scattered especially in Bayan Baru and Gelugor while the Eurasians are historically connected with Pulau Tikus where many of them still reside although the area is also popular among young Chinese professionals from the upper-middle class.

The ethnic competition is closely related to the type of majority-minority relation that was also influenced by party politics since 1957 if not earlier. In the 1950s the Straits Chinese (Peranakan) were known to have rejected independence for Penang which was in sharp contrast with the Alliance struggle (Muhammed Noordin Sopiee, 2005: 63-77). From the Malay point of view this stemmed from the lack of confidence besides their unfavourable political and economic conditions compared to the

Chinese (Md Salleh Md Gaus, 1984; Jamelah Bakar, 1994; Noriah Mohamed, 2005). The Chinese on the other hand seek to hold on to whatever gains they have achieved. Chinese political parties might have dominated Penang politics since 1957 (MCA followed by GERAKAN in 1969 and the DAP since 2008) but they have to face an UMNO dominated federal government and the Malay dominated federal bureaucracy including the Department of Museums and Antiquities. This is reflected in the tenuous balance in the Chinese and Malay cultural displays at the Penang State Museum.

In a way this is closely connected with the nature of the State Museum Board. Unlike other states, the Penang State Museum is supervised by a multiethnic board that in the early years also included Europeans while the Chinese dominance of individual membership within the board was balanced by Malay dominance in official members. From 1964 to 1972 the Penang Museum and Art Gallery was run by a Joint Management Committee appointed by the state government, and a sub-committee responsible for each of the museum and art gallery. The Joint Management Committee was made up of 7 official members, 6 unofficial members and 8 selected members. It was chaired by the State Secretary. The 6 member museum sub-committee were J. C. Cairns, Captain Mohd Noor, A. Nichol-Smith (chairperson), Soon Cheng Sun, J. H. S. Cunyngham-Brown and Low Hun Leong. When Nichol-Smith passed away, Captain Mohd Noor assumed the chairmanship. It was only in 1973 that the Penang State Museum Board was established through a state enactment. It comprised of 22-23 members who were appointed for a one year term except for 1974-76 when appointment was for three years (Penang State Museum Board, 1980: 9). In 1979 the board had 23 members including official and individual members. The Chinese dominated the individual membership with 11 while the others were 2 Malays, 2 Indians (one Sikh and one Tamil) and 2 Europeans/Eurasians besides the 7 Malay official members. In 1978 one academic from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) was appointed to the board for the first time and since then USM was always represented in the board. Before 2006 the USM representatives include an archaeologist, anthropologist and historian. By the first decade of the 21st century their number had increased to three at any one time – 2 historian and curator of the Museum & Gallery Tuanku Fauziah. For the year 1986-87 board membership stood at 26 with Chinese dominating the individual members (10 out of 19) while Malays formed the overwhelming majority of official members (Penang State Museum Board, 1987: 2). For the period 2010-12 the board membership numerically favors the Malays who made up 9 out of the 15 members while the rest were Chinese (4), Indian (1) and Eurasian (1) (Lembaga Muzium & Balai Seni Lukis Negeri Pulau Pinang, 2010: 17-18). Museum curators do have an important say in these appointments: in the late 1980s and early 1990s there was an overwhelming presence of former students of the St. Xavier Institution, one of the premier mission school on the island, as the curator himself was a Xavierian (Tan Kim Hong, 2014).

This is in marked contrast with Kedah, Melaka and Terengganu. For Melaka, the 2002 State Museum Board was made up of 20 members with bureaucrats (official members) constituting a significant number. Two academics (Professor Mohd Yusoff Hashim and Professor Abdul Latiff Abu Bakar) and one from the local history association were also on the board. There were only four politicians with three from UMNO and one from the MCA who represented the lone non-Malay voice in the entire board (Perzim, 2002). As for Kedah, membership of the State Museum Board in 1993 was made up of 14 members with 13 of them Malays while the non-Malay voice was represented by a solitary Chinese Tai Tek Tchin who was also a member of the State Art Gallery (Lembaga Muzium Negeri Kedah, 1992: 3-4). As for Terengganu, board members since the early 1980s were all Malays. Membership varied between 14 and 16. Since 1990 one academic from the Universiti of Malaya was added to the board and two years later, the academic representation remained at three at any one time

which include a well known historian who is a Malaysia specialist (Lembaga Muzium Negeri Terengganu, 1982: 1; Lembaga Muzium Negeri Terengganu, 1990: 1-2).

Equally significant is the contestation within each ethnic group as seen in the Penang State Museum and other private museums in the state. Historically the Straits Chinese or Chinese Peranakan have dominated Penang since 1786 but by the early 20th century they were eclipsed by new arrivals from China. As a result a process of Sinicisation began to take place within the Straits Chinese and through marriage and education the differences between these groups had diminished. However the Penang State Museum still differentiated them – the *lao keh* (old guest) and the *sinkeh* (new arrivals). The *lao keh* are associated with the baba and nyonya which have assimilated elements of Malay culture in their daily life. They also dominated Penang economy after 1850. The Penang *towkay* (merchants and traders) class came from this group and they were well known for their beautiful and spacious mansions besides sending their children to England and China for further education. The *sinkehs* who arrived in the second half of the 19th century were absorbed as labourers, coolies and skill artisans while many of them were sent to other Malay states notably Kedah and Perak. The *kongsi* houses provided shelter and protection to these new arrivals who came from the same clan. Later these *kongsi* houses became economically powerful. The Penang State Museum foregrounds a number of these opulent mansions and *kongsi* houses notably the Khoo Kongsi which is a popular tourist attraction.

The Penang State Museum still accord much attention to the Chinese Peranakans although the lion dance is actually associated with other Chinese not just the Straits Chinese. So is the Pinang Peranakan Museum which was opened in 2010 although its cultural presentation is made without any reference to the kind of multiculturalism found in the Penang State Museum. A pamphlet of the Pinang Peranakan Museum claims that it is more than just a museum “as this century old stately mansion of eclectic design and architecture incorporates Chinese carved-wood panels with English floor tiles and Scottish iron works.” The mansion is the manifestation of Peranakan opulence and grandeur at its best. The exhibits include finely crafted tables, chairs, lacquered tiffin sets, *kebayas*, *kain batik lepas* (both are associated with nyonyas), opium smoking utensils, colorful ceramics (tea set, dishes and *kamcheng*), English glass, slippers, beads and embroideries of the Peranakans. These are dispersed in various rooms located on two floors. These exciting displays would certainly take visitors to a bygone era of Peranakan culture before the tumultuous Japanese Occupation (1942-45). The annex houses a kitchen filled with an assortment of quaint implements, kitchenware and sweet moulds. The building was originally built at the end of the 19th century and served as residence of the Kapitan Cina Chung Keng Kwee who was not a Peranakan himself but incorporated the Peranakan element into the building. There is an ancestral temple that adjoins the mansion. It was built in 1899 and recently restored by skill craftsmen from China. The temple is “ornately decorated with intricate Chinese wood carvings embellished with gold leaf while on the walls above, tableaux casting dramatic scenes from Chinese legends peer down at the visitor.”

The One East Museum and Art, on the other hand, seeks to balance museum coverage on all Chinese including the Straits Chinese. Opened in November 2011 the museum is owned by a local artist Ch'ng Huck Teng. It displays the cultures of both the Chinese and Straits Chinese, paintings and artworks by renowned Chinese artists in Southeast Asia and rare Chinese famille rose figurines, Chinese porcelain, furniture and nyonya wares from the late 19th century to the pre-Chinese Cultural Revolution era. Despite its name there is actually very little art on display in this museum.

Equally significant is the culture competition within the ethnic groups such as the Malays. The issue who constituted a Malay was once subjected to intensely emotional debates among Malay intellectuals in the 1920s. However the 1957 constitution settled the issue by defining Malays as those

who were born a Malay, speak the Malay language and professed Islam as their religion. Today descendants of the Jawi Peranakan are no longer concerned with such debates because they have regarded themselves as Malays. Unlike the Malays of Bima, Indonesia (Andaya, 2013) this acceptance influenced by possible economic benefits but at the risk of neglecting the colorful history of the Jawi Peranakan (Omar Yusoff & Jamaluddin Aziz, 2009; Halimah Mohd Said & Zainab Abdul Majid, 2004). Both the Jawi Peranakan and the Arab Peranakan form a big group of the Penang Malays but museum displays do not provide adequate coverage for them. The Malay Museum which opened in 2010 at Hutton Lane foregrounds the Malay heritage of Penang but there are voices which wanted the museum to focus more on the Jawi Peranakan heritage especially when Hutton Lane was historically connected with the Jawi Peranakan who fondly called it Hatim Road. The museum was formerly the residence of a prominent Malay, Wan Chik Ariffin Mohd Ariff who was a successful rice merchant and wholesaler in the early 20th century (Loh Wei Leng et. al., 2013: 27-28).

The Penang Islamic Museum accords much space to cultural aspects including the profile of Malay leaders like Haji Abdullah Fahim, Haji Ahmad Badawi, Sheikh Omar Basheer, Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi, Ahmad Rashid Talu and Sheikh Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin. These names are either Malays or Arab Peranakan. It is difficult to identify Jawi Peranakan names although many of them were actually founders of the many mosques in the 19th century located in George Town or successful business leaders who have cut their niche in the highly competitive business world of Penang in the late 19th and early 20th century (Mahani Musa & Badriyah Haji Salleh, 2013: 33-58; A Shukor Rahman, 2010). The Penang State Museum displays many types of Malay musical instruments like the *gambus*, *rebab*, drums and flute. Some of these figure in *boria* performances which was an important form of entertainment in the urban or sub-urban enclave of George Town notably among the Jawi Peranakan. *Boria* have strong Persian influences and was popular among the EIC sepoys in Penang's early days. Over the years it had experienced significant transformation from its religious origins to a more secular art form (Rahmah Bujang, 1987). *Boria* troupes were known for their colorful costumes while they compete with one another to the detriment of the socio-economic position of the Malays vis-à-vis the non-Malays (Mohd Yusof Sutan Maidin, 2007: 263-299). After the second world war *boria* was used to impart certain information to the Malays including to exhort them to be progressive farmers (Sohaimi Abdul Aziz & Rosmah Derak, 2010). At the moment there are attempts to revive *boria* troupes although the efforts received little support from the Penang Malays. The Penang State Museum foregrounds picture of a *boria* troupe with a Chinese lady besides colorful *boria* costumes and musical instruments like violin, tambourine, harmonica, maracas, flute and baton used by the troupe leader during performances. On the other hand the Muzium & Gallery Tuanku Fauziah is very selective in its foregrounding of culture that favours the Malays – traditional musical instruments like gong and *rebana*, *wayang kulit* puppets and stage, *kuda kepang*, *barong*, keris and agricultural tools related to traditional agriculture (Malays). Other than the few Chinese musical instruments, there is no reference to the Penang Story while the cultural representation differs very little from museums in Kedah, Kelantan or Terengganu.

Historically the Indian Muslims were the largest donor of *waqf* (*wakaf*) lands within the George Town area but this is never highlighted by the Penang Islamic Museum or the Penang State Museum. *Waqf* have been subjected to various interpretations by the state's Islamic bureaucracy and various other groups and individuals (Nagata, 2002; Fujimoto, 1989). It is meant to provide benefits to Muslims although its history is not entirely free from corruption or misuse. In the old maps of Penang the area around Acheen Street was known as Malay Town which was dominated by Malays and Indian-Muslims. Malay Town have long gone but the area is still related to the Indian-Muslims through *waqf* lands/properties which are rented out well below the market price. Here are found a thriving jewelry

business helmed by the Indian-Muslims like Habib Jewels which was started by an Indian Muslim Habib Mohamed Abdul Latif in 1958 in Pitt Street (Loh Wei Leng et. al., 2013: 79-80; Izrin Muaz Md Adnan, 2012: 1-44). In the Penang State Museum there is reference to Malay printing which started at the end of the 19th century helmed by Arab Peranakan, Malays and also Indian-Muslims. The museum highlights only Acheen Street printers accompanied by the display of a *kitab kuning* (religious treatise) which was ostensibly printed in Penang. By the 20th century successful Malay printers/publishers include the Freeman Press, Muhammadiyah Press, United Press, Pernama Press, Bahtera Press, Jelutong Press, Al-Zainiah Press, Percetakan Sahabat and Al-Huda Press. They were located in various parts of George Town. They made Penang an important centre of knowledge dissemination in colonial Malaya and within the Nusantara region. Their forte were religious treatises, religious books (*kitab*), the Quran, historical texts, novels, magazines and newspapers (Jelani Harun & Azmi Iskandar Merican, 2008: 1-28).

Conclusions

Like other museums the Penang State Museum was affected by the national culture policy that came into existence in 1971 which favours Malay culture. However the museum seeks to balance its cultural representation although this could not hide the contest for cultural supremacy among the various ethnic groups and within each groups. Although heavily influenced by the National Museum since its founding in 1965, the Penang State Museum had discarded natural history in the early 1990s in favour of multiculturalism or the Penang Story. On the other hand the National Museum reinvented itself in 2007 when it changed into a national history museum and discarded culture and natural history. The cultural exhibits were either sent to other museums or kept in the storeroom while the natural history exhibits appeared in the Natural History Museum which was opened in 2010 in Putrajaya. Meanwhile the proliferations of private museums in Penang underscore the cultural (and history) challenge to the state museum. Penang is one of the few states in Malaysia that witnessed the emergence of a large number of private museums especially within the George Town heritage enclave which is well known among domestic and international tourists. These private museums seek to tell different stories; they even posed a challenge to the official cultural trajectory or the Penang Story of the Penang State Museum bringing the contest to a new level.

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